

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 6, 2008

The Honorable Michael Astrue  
Commissioner of Social Security  
Social Security Administration  
500 E Street, S.W., 8th Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20254

Dear Commissioner Astrue:

As Members of the Congressional Hispanic, Black, and Asian Pacific American Caucuses who are committed to improving the health of communities of color and eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities, we write to request an update on the Social Security Administration's efforts to improve the collection of data on race, ethnicity, and primary language.

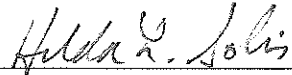
Much of the demographic data used in health research derives from information collected by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Reports by the Institute of Medicine, the National Academy of Social Insurance, and many other groups have made clear that collecting accurate data on race, ethnicity, and primary language is an essential first step toward eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. However, these reports indicate that the quality of SSA's data on race, ethnicity, and primary language needs to be improved.

In 1997, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) established new standards for federal data on race and ethnicity. Ten years later, SSA has yet to revise the Application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5) to reflect these new categories. The Enumeration at Birth process poses a further problem for data collection, since state vital statistics offices have been unwilling to provide SSA with data on race and ethnicity for infants issued Social Security numbers at birth.

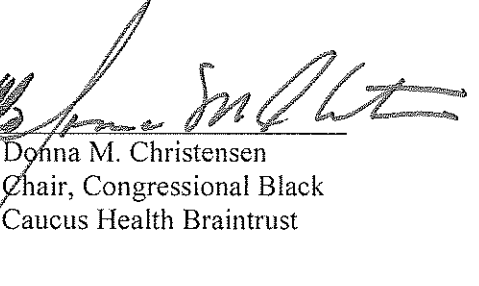
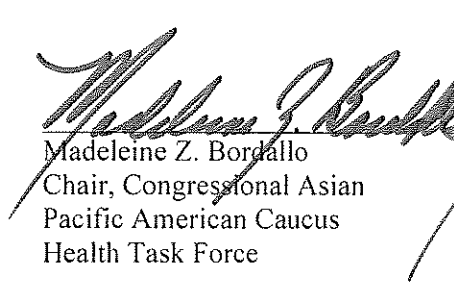
In addition, it has been suggested that data on race, ethnicity, and primary language be collected at the time of initial application for a Social Security, Medicare, or Supplemental Security Income benefit, or of subsequent redetermination. SSA initiated planning and analysis of this activity in 2005, but we understand that the effort was put on hold for lack of resources. We would like to be informed about the current status of this effort and when SSA expects to be able to collect data that complies with OMB standards.

We consider these issues to be of great importance and look forward to a response regarding SSA's efforts to improve the quality of its data on race, ethnicity, and primary language by June 1, 2008.

Sincerely,



Hilda L. Solis  
Chair, Congressional Hispanic  
Caucus Task Force on Health  
and the Environment

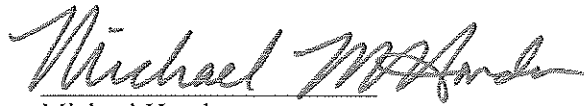


Madeleine Z. Bordallo  
Chair, Congressional Asian  
Pacific American Caucus  
Health Task Force

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